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Interview with Barbara Atkins and Janet Mitchell by Andrea L'Hommedieu

Barbara M. Atkins

Janet F. Mitchell

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George J. Mitchell Oral History Project

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Barbara M. Atkins and Janet F. Mitchell

(Interviewer: Andrea L'Hommedieu)

GMOH# 020

July 14, 2008

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project; the date is July 14, 2008. We're at the home of Barbara Atkins in Waterville, Maine, this is Andrea L'Hommedieu, and today I'm interviewing Barbara Atkins and Janet Mitchell. Barbara, could you start just by giving me your full name?

Barbara Atkins: Okay, Barbara Mitchell Atkins.

AL: And where and when were you born?

BA: I was born in Waterville, July 16, 1935. How did you ever ask a question like that? Okay, go ahead.

AL: So were you, did you grow up in the Waterville area?

BA: Yes, I did, yes. As did all of my brothers, the entire family grew up here.

AL: Okay, and your older brothers, were they actually born in -?

BA: No, my two oldest brothers, Paul and John, were born in Huntington, Massachusetts, and Rob, Robert, George, and myself were born in Waterville.

AL: Now, what part of Waterville were, did you grow up in?

BA: We grew up in an area right by the Kennebec River known as the Head of Falls, King Court, the Head of Falls, and it was actually predominantly the Lebanese who had immigrated to the Waterville area lived there, so it was an enclave mainly of Lebanese people.

AL: And were there other cultures that lived nearby?

BA: I think on the other side of Temple Street, that was the dividing line, Temple Street, I think there were French families who lived there. But on the two, as you go down Temple Street toward the river, on the right hand side there were the two streets, Head of Falls and King Court, those were almost entirely a hundred percent Lebanese, yeah.

AL: So there was a strong community of people at that time.

BA: At that time there was, yes.

AL: And that area doesn't include houses anymore, does it?

BA: No, the area was razed for the urban renewal project in Waterville in the, I think '60s, the urban renewal project took place, and that entire area was razed. And now it's, actually it's, parking lots are down that way.

AL: Now with all the Lebanese people in one area, did you have shops and churches and things like that?

BA: Well, we had a church, we had, well shops, we had little grocery stores. As a matter of fact, my grandmother and grandfather owned a little grocery store, a very small one. And the church was not very far away, the church that served the Lebanese community. Of course we were mainly, I believe almost all the Lebanese who were down there were Roman Catholics of the Eastern Rite, Maronites, so we had our own Maronite church, and there was a fairly larger grocery store on Front Street, two of them were owned by the Lebanese, so we were a very close community, didn't travel very far from that area.

AL: Right.

BA: And I think maybe a three or four minute from where we were was the old Waterville Boys' Club, so, you know, the kids didn't have to go far to play and, yeah, it was a very, in retrospect, it was a very safe, secure and happy place to grow up, yes.

AL: Were there other families in particular that were very close to yours?

BA: Well I think the entire, yeah, I mean we were almost on top of one another.

AL: Right.

BA: The houses were all attached, and you know, they were in the old style of duplex homes and so on, yes. There was a bakery there also, the Hikels ran a bakery, so we were close. Perhaps there were one or two families that were closer than others to us, but I just think the entire community was quite close.

AL: Now, can you talk a little bit about your brother George growing up, in terms of, how much older is he than you?

BA: He is two years, almost exactly. His birthday is in August and mine in July, he's two years older than I am. And we talk about the area down by the river banks, we left there in 1939 so I was only four years old, George was six, so I really don't have too many memories of growing up in that area. And we moved to Front Street, which really, again, was not very far

away, but those are the memories that I have growing up, in the Front Street area.

AL: Right.

BA: And George being two years older than me, we were rather close, yes, I was quite close to my brother George.

We went to a Catholic school that was attached to, I guess you'd say, part of the Maronite Church; St. Joseph's Maronite School, and at that school I think the classes were what you'd call open classes. So the children from first grade to third or fourth grade were in one room, and then fifth and sixth and so on in another room, so I think I even went to early classes with George. Even though he would have been two years ahead of me, we were always in the same room –

AL: Right.

BA: - in early, our early school days.

AL: So what was he like in the classroom?

BA: Well, first of all, I think he, well he was probably a rather precocious young man. But he, I think he was a little bit like all the other kids and had friends, and we played and we read comic books and we played sports and so on. But I was just up in the attic this morning looking at old newspapers that I had, I didn't know if you were interested in taking some old newspapers, and one of the papers had a picture of George with his first teacher at St. Joseph's, a Mother Claveria (*sounds like*), and she said he was very, very smart as a student, so I can speak for her. I don't know, I, you know, I don't really remember much in the first, second or third grades except that I'm sure he did well, because he was advanced two years.

AL: That's early in the process to be advanced two years.

BA: Right.

AL: Did your parents do a lot of reading with you at home?

BA: Well my father was very, very interested in geography and *National Geographic* and reading that sort of thing, train magazines, he loved the trains. You probably heard this from my brothers, I don't know, but we lived right by the train tracks so we, that was a game we'd play – try to count how many trains were going by.

But anyway, I think Daddy not so much read to us but, or, we didn't have a bedtime, like nursery stories at bedtime, that kind of thing, but he provided interesting times for us. We would sit and he'd ask us to name states and what did we learn in school today and so on and so forth.

And of course my mother, she could not read or write English, she read and wrote Arabic, so she

was not able to read to us in English. And as a matter of fact, in later days my nieces, her grandchildren, as a matter of fact I think some of Janet's children, tried to teach her – what was it? – *Hiawatha*, I remember them teaching Sitto, Sitto is the name for grandmother in Arabic, and I can just see them sitting around and Mama trying to read, “On the shores of Gitche Gumee,” and so they tried to teach her to read English.

AL: Oh that's neat.

BA: But they did, they emphasized study and wanted to make sure that we were active that way, in our studies.

AL: I want to switch to you for a minute, Janet, and could you give me your full name?

Janet Mitchell: My name is Janet Fraser Mitchell.

AL: And where and when were you born?

JM: I was born in [p/o] [Portland, Maine, on] December 5, 1931. [We lived in Westbrook].

AL: So did you grow up in the Westbrook area, or move -?

JM: I moved to Waterville when I was fifteen, and entered as a sophomore in Waterville High School.

AL: And so you were in George's class.

JM: I was in George's class, yes, we graduated together. Although George had been advanced two years when he was in elementary school, so that he was a year-and-a-half younger than I was.

AL: So did you know him as a friend?

JM: I did, I knew him as a friend and then by November I was dating his brother Robert, which was a long-lasting courtship. And so I knew both George and [his] family, [p/o] who were the most hospitable people that you could probably ever meet, and they embraced all of the girlfriends and so I saw a lot of George both at school and at home.

AL: And what did you think of him? What did -?

JM: George, by that time, was obviously a very, very intelligent young man. And also a very caring young man. My mother was a widow and I remember particularly one Christmas when I was first married and my husband was in the service, and George going to get a Christmas tree and bringing it back, and my mother wasn't satisfied with it, and he went out and got another one. And after he left she said, “That young man is going to go far.” And he sure did!

AL: He sure did. Oh, that's a neat story.

JM: And then of course, while he was in school and so on, I did see a lot of him, with the family.

AL: Right.

JM: And then [later] we all got very involved when he started working for Muskie, and when he started getting involved in politics. From old to young, we were all involved.

AL: Yeah. Well, I remember hearing a story, and I bet you could tell me a little more about it. It's about a job that Robbie and George had, was that in high school?

BA: High school.

JM: That was in high school. Okay, [p/o] my husband got a job sweeping the Boys' Club, where all the boys were very involved with the Boys' Club, they played there a lot, they learned basketball there and so on. And so my husband got this job to sweep the Boys' Club and hired George. And so how George tells it, and we've heard it often, it's one of his favorite stories, he would sweep the Boys' Club and Robbie would go in the office and call me and talk on the telephone. So at the end of the week, he would give George a couple of dollars. I don't remember what it was –

AL: Right.

JM: Then after a while George learned that [Robbie] was getting fifteen dollars a week to sweep the Boys' Club, and so he said to his brother, "Well how come, I'm doing all the work and you get fifteen dollars and you only give me two or three?" And so then George always makes the comment that Robbie claimed that was the difference between management and labor, yeah. It's a story that's been told frequently, but it always gets a nice chuckle.

AL: Yeah. Now your parents moved to Waterville, your mother was widowed?

JM: [substantial paragraph revision] My mother was widowed when I was six. She taught school after my father died and then worked as personnel director at the South Portland shipyard during World War II. In 1947 she was hired as the assistant alumni secretary at Colby College, so we moved to Waterville.

AL: Right. And she was alumni secretary at Colby?

JM: No, she was assistant alumni secretary.

AL: Yeah.

JM: Bill Millet was the alumni secretary.

AL: Okay. And so you just met Robbie in school?

JM: Oh yes. I remember distinctly meeting Robbie in school, [we were both 15]. I remember he was at the bottom of the stairs and I was coming down the stairs, and he was a very handsome [young] man with a wonderful smile, and I walked down the stairs and thought, "That's the one for me."

AL: Wow. Now Barbara, I wanted to ask you about your husband.

BA: Okay.

AL: He went by Eddie Atkins?

BA: Eddie Atkins, and he owned a print shop here in town, Atkins Printing.

AL: And that, he was very active in Democratic -

BA: Very, very active in Democratic politics. Well not, he never ran for an office.

AL: Right.

BA: But I mean he was active in support -

AL: Right.

BA: - of the Democratic Party. He was a close friend of Ed Muskie's, and then of course he, well right through, almost to the end, he supported all the Democratic candidates both financially and with printing and so on, so we were active in a lot of the campaigns, not only for George but for some of the other Democrats, yes.

AL: And early on, too.

BA: Early on, oh, early, early supporter, yes, before, before it became a Democratic, a blue state.

AL: Right, so in the '50s?

BA: In the '50s, yes.

AL: And that must have been, I would think that the support of printing was very important in that '54 election.

BA: It was, in the, with the Muskie election?

AL: Yeah, right.

BA: Yes, yes it was. So it was a good time, we had a great time doing it, enjoyed it immensely.

AL: And that, well I'm just thinking that that's an important connection early on between, because Senator Mitchell really connected with Senator Muskie later.

BA: Later, that came later, in the '60s when he worked in his office in Washington.

AL: Right.

BA: But it *was* a very important connection, the fact that Atkins was with Muskie, and then we went on to do, of course, all of George's printing and so on. And we –

AL: Can you talk to, it's important in oral histories to get a sense of family traditions or family stories. I know we just recounted a couple. Are there others that you can think of -?

BA: Well I don't know if you, yeah, I would like to tell you, you ask about when he was a child, when we were young. I have repeated this story a few times, and perhaps my brothers have mentioned to you in earlier interviews. But George was an altar boy, and he, at that young age I guess, he read pretty well and so the priest at the time wanted him to be the reader of the Epistle, every Sunday he read the Epistle. And my father, being very, very careful and cautious and wanted to make sure George made no mistakes and so on, we used to have a double living room and dining room, it was kind of an open area, so every Saturday I guess it was, we didn't have Mass on Saturdays then, of course, Mass was on Sunday, so every Saturday my father would have George stand at the further end of the living room and he would get into the, this other end of the dining room, and George would have to read it and read it and read it until my father was happy. Well, all the time that he was reading it, I used to stand behind [my father] and make faces, I'd stick my tongue out and do all kinds of things to try to make him laugh and so on. And it, no, he was very, very concentrated on reading, so I didn't disrupt that too often. But he did, he, and he read that Epistle every Sunday when we were kids at, growing up.

AL: And you said your father would stand away?

BA: Oh, away, two rooms, in the next room, to make sure that he could be heard and he was pronouncing words carefully and clearly and so on.

AL: And projecting?

BA: And projecting.

AL: Yes.

BA: So I, you know, he's got a great way of speaking extemporaneously and, anyway, so that may have been the start of it, I don't know, reading the Epistle at church on Sundays, growing up.

AL: And your personal training of getting him to focus.

BA: Yeah. Well, I never thought of it that way, I'll have to remind him of that, yes.

AL: You have to take a little credit for that.

BA: Yeah, yeah. But that, that's an interesting thing he did. And then of course we, getting, again, you wanted a little bit of childhood information, we used to, at that time, read what we called funny books. Now they're comics, but back then it was funny books, and that was what we read, funny books, and we used to trade and so on. And he was a great reader of funny books.

AL: Are there any in particular you remember?

BA: Captain Marvel.

AL: Yeah.

BA: I don't know that I remember, no.

AL: Specifically, yeah.

BA: I don't really, yeah. But that was a lot of fun. And then of course in the summer when we were kids, we used to pick beans. We had jobs like that, we all worked. Robbie of course always had terrific jobs, he always found -

JM: It was always in management.

BA: Yeah, but I remember several summers George and I were part of the group of young kids in the area who'd board that bus and go to New Sharon, Maine and pick beans and pick whatever vegetable was, you know, whatever crop was coming out. So we, those are some of his early jobs.

AL: Oh yeah, well I can remember, because my dad grew up in China, Maine, and - .

BA: Oh, I have a camp there.

AL: Yeah. He picked cucumbers for a pickle factory, (*unintelligible*) pickle factory.

BA: Oh, okay, yeah, yeah, well we did that. I don't, we may have picked cucumbers, I don't remember, but we did -

AL: But the beans you remember.

BA: But the beans I remember, yes I do.

AL: Yeah. Can you all talk a little bit more about Robbie, because I can't interview him obviously but he's a wonderful part of the family that I think we want to capture, especially in terms of him being close in age to your brother George.

JM: Hmm-hmm. He also was a year-and-a-half older than George, and so *was* very close to him. And we did a lot of family get-togethers. My mother-in-law used to always have all the different families come for Christmas dinner and Thanksgiving dinner, and there were always big discussions turning into arguments that were very loud.

BA: Hmm-hmm.

JM: And all the grandchildren were involved, and it was a very wonderful way for not only the adults in the family to become close, but also for all of my in-laws' grandchildren, and they are still very close.

BA: Yeah, speaking, you mention the grandchildren now. My mother had what we called the summer kitchen, it was like a pantry that she would open up in the summer time, and there was a table there and then another small table in the kitchen. Well, the grandchildren always sat at the tables in the summer kitchen or in the kitchen, and oh, it was a big deal when they were old enough to get to the adult table. But there were always many, many grandchildren involved in all these dinners and so on.

But I think you wanted more about Robbie, too.

AL: Yes.

JM: Yes, my husband went to the University of Rhode Island, as his brother John did also. And after he went to the University of Rhode Island he joined the Marine Corps, and so was away a great deal. And I remember when my second child was born, George drove me to the hospital in Bangor [where] there was a military hospital where my daughter Ann was born, and he was very, very caring and nervous. [It's] a wonderful family that I'm so fortunate to be a part of.

And my husband, after he got out of the service, became a Federal Deposit [Insurance Corporation] bank examiner, and so he traveled around, that's what he did for a job [p/o] for

many years. Later he became president of two banks.

AL: Wow.

JM: So –

AL: And so how did his relationship, how was it maintained with his brother George over the years?

JM: Over the years, until George got so busy with things in Washington, we saw a lot of him. But as he got very busy, what he would do when he came to Waterville, would come to Barbara's, and she would make a wonderful dinner for everybody, and then the men would play cribbage. And there were so many, many evenings of them around the kitchen table, all playing cribbage. And it was a great way for them to [spend an evening]. They were very, very close all their lives. Very, and Robbie was so very, very proud of George.

AL: Now, how did they do playing cribbage with each other? It must have been pretty competitive.

BA: They fought, they screamed, they yelled, it was *awful*, yeah.

AL: But they had fun at the same time.

BA: They had fun, and they, I mean they played and played for hours and hours. If it was evening, which many times it was, I would just go to bed, but I mean I could not fall asleep, there was so much shouting and yelling and screaming and hollering down in the kitchen area. But, no, they enjoyed the game and they were very competitive, but they always ended up shaking hands as they left, yeah.

AL: Now are all, do all the brothers tend to be competitive and -?

BA: Yes.

JM: And the sister, too!

BA: And it's been passed on to the nieces and nephews also; they're very competitive.

AL: Are they?

BA: Oh yes, yeah.

AL: Now has the tradition of cribbage been passed on to the grandkids, or the nieces and nephews?

BA: Not to my knowledge, so much. No, I think that was George's passion.

AL: Does he still play once in a while?

BA: He may when he's in Maine, up in Seal Harbor. I'm not sure, but it, it may have been just a time in his life when he played cribbage. I'm not sure if he does or not, you'd have to ask him.

AL: Yes, well that will be on my questions.

BA: But when he comes down here now, with his family and with all the families that, around, there's always other things to do and so we don't have time just to –

AL: Right.

BA: - sit and play cribbage any longer. But it was always a fun time.

AL: Yeah.

BA: And I enjoyed when he did stay here, and enjoyed the camaraderie and the love that was always shown.

AL: So here was where he usually came when he was in Washington and would come to Maine, in the Senate.

BA: Yes, yeah. Hmm-hmm.

AL: How - were there things that you had to, I'd kind of say, 'handle' in terms of, did people bother you?

BA: No.

AL: Was -?

BA: No.

AL: Not like that rock star (*unintelligible*)?

BA: No, no. Occasionally the *Sentinel* would do a story when he came into town, wanted to interview, and they would come up here and, you know, take a few pictures and, photographs, and have an interview. But no, it wasn't bothersome at all. And sometimes I liked it; once in a while I got my face in the paper so that was always pretty enjoyable.

AL: Yeah. And Barbara, were you involved in the library renovation in town? Maybe not.

BA: No.

AL: No, I'm sorry.

JM: I think you were involved in the library at the George Mitchell School, did you do something?

BA: No, no, I don't know, you're thinking of someone else.

AL: Okay, then I apologize; I had the wrong information.

BA: No, no, the only thing I did at the George Mitchell School is, he sent books up here to go into the library there one time, and I just –

AL: Right.

BA: - took them up. So no, there was no involvement. Yeah.

AL: Yeah, yeah. Can you talk a little bit about your parents, and maybe you talk about her parents in terms of in-laws in terms of parents, and traditions in the family, maybe Lebanese food that passed on, things like that?

BA: Well, of course my mother worked, but she always still managed to have a good meal on the table every day, and she was a wonderful cook and passed that tradition down to, well, my sisters-in-law, me, and that is one tradition, unlike the cribbage, that *has* been passed down to the nieces and the great-nieces, because they all do cook Lebanese, in the Lebanese cuisine. So she, but she was always very busy cooking, baking and working. And, but I, it was not noticeable, of her absence – let me start this over again. I want to say, she worked but she always seemed to be there, if you know what I mean. She worked nights a lot. She worked some, the early years she didn't work nights, but then she worked at the different mills around here in the evening so she was able to be there in the mornings to make sure that we got off to school and so on. But she was a very, she was very intent on maintaining harmony in her life through her family, her husband, her religion, and this was the core of my mother's, the essence of my mother, those were the important things to her.

And my father was a terrific man. He worked, also, very hard through his life, and he was a man who kind of did push us in directions, make sure we did our, mainly in school and so on, he was always interested in us learning new things. And he was quite an interesting man, he never, my father never went beyond the fifth grade, I think it was, in school, yet he spoke – because he was adopted at age four by Lebanese people, he was able to read and write Arabic, and he, well I don't know if he read French but he spoke French, because as a young man, those first fifth, five years of schooling, he went to St. Francis School here. So he spoke French and Arabic and English, so he was a, he was quite an interesting man.

JM: And he was a very knowledgeable man. He read a lot and retained what he learned. Both my mother-in-law and father-in-law were very adamant that their children be well educated. And it was quite a feat that all five of the children graduated from college, and more than one has [p/o] an advanced degree. My mother-in-law was a very powerful personality. She wanted her children to grow up in the right way, she was a very, very religious person, you would see her saying her prayers sitting in that rocking chair.

BA: Yeah, every day she said her rosary.

JM: In the dining room, in the afternoon, she would take out time to say her prayers, to say the rosary [p/o]. She was a very big influence in her children's life and in all of her, the daughters-in-law and her son-in-law's life. And so was my father-in-law, they were very different personalities.

BA: I have to tell you though – you want a little humor, humorous stories – a story about Daddy. I was, I don't know when it was, later on in my life, and I went to some kind of a function and met a professor from Colby who was the head of the geology department. And I, at that time, had the opportunity to tell him that I studied geology at the University of Maine simply because my father, when he worked at, he was a janitor at Colby, and when he worked at Colby he was so interested in – it was Donaldson Koons, that was the professor's name – he was so interested in Koons's lectures, and I guess oftentimes the doors were open, my father would stand and listen to his lectures time and time again, and he would come home and talk to me about the drumlin that goes up a main street and this, all kinds of things about geology. So I was able to tell Professor Koons that because of my father listening in to his lectures, I studied geology at the University of Maine. So, but Daddy did do things like that, he was quite interested in a great array of subjects, so, but -.

(Aside. Pause)

AL: And so – oh, thank you – and you were going to tell me about Sittoo and baking bread?

JM: And baking bread. I was fortunate enough to live with my in-laws for half a year. When my husband got out of the service we lived with them for half a year, so I learned to cook by watching. And of course my mother-in-law never measured anything. If she was baking a cake she would put everything in her hand to measure, it was all -

BA: Always the size of a grape or a size of an egg, those were, “Put in the size of a grape or the size of a walnut, or the size of an egg.” Whatever you were putting in, that was the way she described things.

JM: And so that was the way that she did cook everything, so I could observe her cooking. But when she made bread, she would use up twenty-five pounds of flour making Lebanese bread, and she would make [all] different types of bread. She would make what you would call

khoubiz, which is the bread, the smaller bread that rises up, like pita bread.

AL: Oh okay.

JM: But then she would also make the larger bread which, Barbara, is called?

BA: Marouk.

JM: Marouk bread, which you have to twirl like you twirl a pizza [dough]. And then she would make the specialty breads like zaatar, which is, has –

BA: Thyme.

JM: - sumac and thyme.

BA: Thyme, sesame.

JM: A very spicy type of bread, and spinach turnovers, and all different kinds of wonderful things that would [p/o] [make her kitchen] just smell heavenly. It was great.

AL: And this was very different from the cooking that you had grown up with?

JM: Oh yes, absolutely, very, very different. My mother-in-law and father-in-law were so very hospitable to my mother, and they had her, often [p/o] for dinner on Sundays. My mother would have wonderful discussions with my father-in-law. [interviewee insertion: I will always be thankful for the kindness my in-laws showed my mother and all of my family.]

AL: Are there other family stories or things that you can recall that I haven't asked you about?

End of Side A
Side B

AL: Testing. We're now on side B. And Barbara, I know that your brother John talked a little bit about, we call it 'the goat's milk story.'

BA: Oh.

AL: Can you elaborate a little further, or describe what you remember?

BA: My memories about goat's milk are, George, because he, as my mother used to say, was a little bit sickly, he had colds and just had a lot of childhood little colds and things, she always thought since, coming from Lebanon, where they had goat's milk as opposed to cow's milk, I don't think they had much cow's milk there, but she was certain that goat's milk would be better for George than the cow's milk. So she and my father would borrow a car once a week and drive

from Waterville to Clinton to the goats farm, there was a goat farmer up there, and buy the goat's milk, proceed to bring that home, and of course at the time we had glass milk bottles, if, which I don't know if you recall that, you're a fairly young woman, but she would proceed to put the goat's milk into the regular Clarence Shores glass bottles, thinking that he would not know the difference. And of course we were always told that we could not touch those particular bottles, I wasn't allowed to drink any of the goat's milk, and Robbie, John, or Paul. But years later, as it turned out, George, I think he even told Mama, that he always knew that he was drinking goat's milk and not cow's milk, but being such a good boy, he didn't want to upset her and let her think that her little trick wasn't working. But she always felt that this helped him, and maybe it did. And maybe as Johnny said, "Maybe that's why he's so much smarter than many of us," the goat's milk may have helped him.

But you were talking with Janet about, or Janet was mentioning the cooking and the baking and so on. They, my mother and father were particularly interested in food, and way back then, now we're talking the '30s and the '40s, we were eating yogurt, and whole grains; my mother and father were very much into wheat bread, whole wheat bread, so when I, and lentils and very, very healthy foods that are quite in vogue now. And so they were interested in our nutrition, quite interested in that, yes.

AL: Is there anything else that you'd like to add?

JM: Well, I'll add something that, I don't even know if Barbara knows this. When my husband got out of the service and got this job at the FDIC, he didn't have a car. So he had to travel. So he would either take the train or he would hitchhike to Burlington, Vermont, to northern Maine; he had to go all over New England. George came home and saw that Robbie didn't have a car, and he *gave* him a car. Now this was a young man [who] did not have a lot of money, but it was a beautiful, generous act.

BA: My first watch was from my brother George. I still have that, an Omega watch. When he was in Germany, in the army, I know the year, it was 1956, I'm almost certain, he sent me a watch for Christmas, and that's the first one I ever had. So he was very generous.

AL: Did he ever talk to you about how he liked the military? If he -?

BA: No, and it's interesting, no, he never talked much about it. We knew that he was in counter-intelligence, and I knew he was at Fort Mead and I knew that was a fairly secretive thing, but about three weeks ago I was in Washington with my niece Ann, Janet's daughter Ann, and we had to go to Baltimore for the flight. So we had a driver from Washington to Baltimore, and we passed Fort Mead and I just made the comment that, "This is where," I was telling Ann, "this is where Uncle George was when he was in the service." And the driver said, "Oh boy," he said, "he must be a real spook because." He said, "It is so secretive at Fort Mead that you can't get close to the place."

AL: Wow.

BA: So whether he –

AL: Right.

BA: - just didn't care to talk about things, or whether he just didn't, yeah, but that's where he did his military training, at Fort Mead, which is as the driver said, "The super, super spooky intelligence place," so.

AL: The other thing that I'm very curious about is, Senator Mitchell was offered a Supreme Court judgeship, and that wasn't something he decided to take them up on.

BA: That's right, and I must say, I don't know as I can even count on one finger anybody who's refused a Supreme Court judgeship. But of course he had been a federal judge prior to that, so maybe, and it, that was a very short time, maybe six months or whatever before he went into the Senate. Maybe from that experience he realized this was something that he truly would not want to do the rest of his life or whatever, I don't know. But he did refuse that judgeship.

AL: But it wasn't something he came and sat down with you about?

BA: No, no, not with me. He may have with the brothers, but I.

AL: Yeah.

BA: No, no.

AL: I just wondered.

BA: I think when he was, okay, no, but what you may have heard from the brothers, when he was offered the Senate seat with Joe Brennan, the governor at the time.

AL: Right.

BA: Should he leave the judgeship and go into the Senate? I think he did come and ask us all what we thought on that.

AL: Yeah.

BA: Because of course, the judgeship, he was a federal judge at the time, that's a lifetime and, you know, so he was making that decision, whether to leave that and go into the Senate where I believe he asked the advice. But I don't think he asked, well I know he didn't ask me advice of whether he should take a Supreme Court -

JM: I *know* that Robbie was disappointed that he didn't take that Supreme Court offer

because, he said, “Then he would have been in all three branches of government,” you know. No, he wouldn’t have been president.

BA: No, he wouldn’t have been executive, Jan, no.

JM: He would have been in two branches of government. Then maybe [Robbie] was hoping [he would be] in the executive position.

BA: Yeah, which I think we all hoped. Yeah.

AL: Oh yeah.

JM: He would have been a wonderful president.

BA: Yes, he would have.

AL: We grow them nicely in Maine, don’t we?

BA: Yes, yes –

AL: There’s something about the Maine experience.

BA: I think so.

JM: I think there are a lot of people with a lot of integrity in Maine.

BA: And a good sense of, independence and a good sense, a good way, really independent and not having to rely on this or that to make a decision, money or this or –

AL: Yeah. Great, thank you very much.

End of Interview